

MENTAL HEALTH



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Tips for Health Managers from the Head Start National Center on Health

What Is Early Childhood Mental Health?

Early childhood mental health (birth to 5 years) is a child's growing capacity to do these things, all in the cultural context of family and community (adapted from ZERO TO THREE):

- Experience, regulate, and express emotions
- Develop close, secure, relationships
- Explore the surroundings and learn.

Early childhood mental health is the same as social emotional development.

Why Is It Important?

Mental health is important because it affects a child's ability to:

- Express their needs
- Pay attention
- Solve problems
- Get along with others
- Follow directions
- Persist when challenged
- Manage their emotions
- Take initiative
- Be curious and interested in learning



Mental Health Services in EHS/HS Include:

- Promotion—helping all children to feel good about themselves, to get along with others and to manage their behavior
- Prevention—reducing the likelihood that children will develop mental health problems and reducing the impact of mental health problems that do exist
- Early Identification—paying attention to mental health problems early on
- Treatment—obtaining the appropriate help for children with mental health problems

Mental Health and School Readiness

Children's mental health is critical to their later school success.

- Children who are able to follow directions and pay attention are able to focus on learning.
- Children who can express their feelings are able to get help when they need it.
- Children who learn to persist when frustrated can overcome challenges.
- Children who feel good about themselves are able to work on their own.
- Children who can control their behavior are able to stay on task.

10 things you should know

- 1 Mental health is an essential part of health.
- 2 The mental health of young children is linked to the well-being of the people who care for them.
- 3 Promoting the mental health of infants and young children can make a positive difference for years to come.
- 4 Positive relationships support positive mental health.
- 5 Culture plays an important role in young children's mental health and in how families view mental health and behavior.
- 6 The more staff and families know about mental health the better they are able to support it.
- 7 Addressing mental health concerns when children are young is more effective than waiting until they are older.
- 8 Mental health must be an integral part of Early Head Start and Head Start.
- 9 Each Head Start program is required to have a mental health professional on-site on a regular basis.
- 10 Programs that focus on mental health are able to design services that improve children's behavior.

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Key Resources for Head Start Managers

Center on the Social Emotional Foundations of Early Childhood (CSEFEL). <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/> This website offers extensive, user-friendly training materials, videos, and print resources to help early care, health, and education providers promote children's social emotional development.

Head Start. *Mental Health*. Retrieved from: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/Mental%20Health/Program%20Planning,%20Design%20%26%20Management/Staff%20Support/Bulletin80.htm> This bulletin includes some of the most current strategies and approaches to mental health in Head Start.

Head Start. *Early Childhood Mental Health in Early Head Start and Head Start: View On-Demand Webcast*.

Retrieved from: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/resources/video/Early%20Childhood%20Mental%20Health%20in%20Early%20Head%20Start%20and%20Head%20Start%20Webcast/EarlyChildhoodM.htm>

This webcast explores resources that help programs improve mental health services and discover the importance of relationships to a child's development.

Institute of Medicine.
<http://nationalacademies.org/nrc/>

National Research Council.
<http://nationalacademies.org/nrc/>

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child.
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/activities/council/>

Zero to Three.
<http://www.zerotothree.org/>

Key Resources to Share With Families:

ZERO TO THREE's family resources. These resources address some of the most common (and challenging) issues facing parents of babies and toddlers. <http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/parenting-resources/podcast/>

Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation for Families. This site provides practical tools to help families build positive relationships with their children. http://www.ecmhc.org/materials_families.html

